



# TROUBLESOME SOURCES: NICHOLAS WADE'S EMBRACE OF SCIENTIFIC RACISM

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by Jon Phillips

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*Editor's Note: Earlier this month, a book by a well-known science writer was published by Penguin Press that seemed to support many of the claims made by academic racists over the years. Because of the importance to the proponents of racism and anti-Semitism of the controversial assertions made in A Troublesome Inheritance: Genes, Race and Human History, Hatewatch asked Jon Phillips, a graduate student and free-lance writer who studies the history of science with a focus on politics and evolutionary biology, to review the 278-page book and its claims.*

Nicholas Wade's new book, *A Troublesome Inheritance*, is only the latest in a [long line of works](#) arguing that humans can be divided into discrete races, and that between those races, there are differences in behavior, temperament, intelligence, and even political and economic structures. Although the specifics of the arguments change, what remains constant is the idea that white people of European descent are inherently smarter, better, more

“civilized” than members of other races, especially black Africans and their descendants. Wade’s work is no exception.

This book’s failure as a work of popular science has been well documented by biologists and anthropologists. This review will focus on another problem with Wade’s book, one just as damning as its scientific errors: its uncritical reliance on and legitimization of fringe racist theories masquerading as mainstream biology.



Wade, a former science writer for *The New York Times*, attempts to fabricate a sense of scientific credibility for his outlandish theories with the division of his book into two very different sections. The first half is intended as a survey of the history and science of research into human evolution, race, and genetics, and Wade supports most of his claims with citations to scientific literature.

In the second, more “speculative” half of the book, Wade’s claims about human genetics and evolution continue, but the scientific sources disappear. It is in this part of the book, for example, that Wade explains modern history through the claim that “European populations” have a genetic predisposition to “open societies and the rule of law to autocracies,” while the Chinese are inherently “drawn to a system of family obligations, political hierarchy, and conformity.” He posits that white Europeans and East Asians are innately more intelligent than Papuans or members of other “Stone Age societies” because “intelligence can be more highly rewarded in modern societies because it is in far greater demand.”

Although he acknowledges at the outset that these portions of the book are intended to be speculative, in the text he presents these racist, hackneyed ideas as though they are simple facts, uncontroversial and incontrovertible.

Wade is not only interested in rewriting the history of human civilization on a grand scale; he also rewrites the history of scientific racism. To point out one particularly egregious example, Wade takes his readers on a brief but confused tour of evolutionary and eugenic thought from Darwin through the Holocaust. In this survey, he claims that by 1933, eugenics had been rejected by scientists and the public in both Britain and the United States. From then on, according to Wade, it was the sole purview of Nazi researchers.

Of course, eugenics remained popular in both the U.S. and the U.K. beyond the 1930s. Even after it was finally relegated to the fringes of the scientific community, sterilization laws remained on the books well into the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. [The last forcible sterilization in Oregon occurred in the 1980s](#), while [California sterilized at least 148 female prisoners between 2006 and 2010](#).

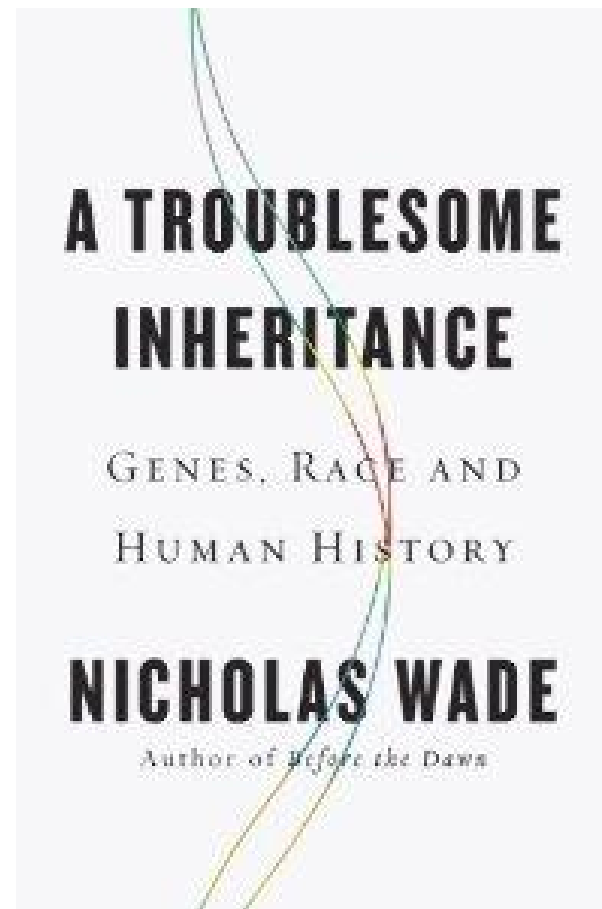
Even more remarkably, Wade manages to write a summary of American eugenics that completely neglects to mention [the Pioneer Fund](#). Founded by Nazi sympathizers in 1937, the Pioneer Fund was, and continues to be, the chief source of financial support for eugenic research in the postwar period. One cannot help but wonder if this omission is related to the fact that Wade approvingly cites Pioneer grantees like [Arthur Jensen](#), and relies heavily on the work of the Fund's current president, [Richard Lynn](#), for data on the low IQs of black populations worldwide.

Both Lynn and Jensen spent decades forcefully arguing for eugenic policies. Moreover, Lynn, who Wade describes simply as “a

psychologist at the University of Ulster,” serves on the editorial board of the white supremacist “journal” *Mankind Quarterly*, has argued in favor of “phasing out” unfit populations, and claimed that in order to ensure the survival of “white civilization” in the United States, “predominantly white states should declare independence and secede from the Union.”

Nor is Lynn the only white supremacist whose ideas Wade promotes. In what is probably the most ill-judged element of his entire project, Wade decided to devote an entire chapter to the issue of Jewish intelligence and biological distinctiveness. Wade frames his discussion around a revisionist history of Judaism by two economists, Maristella Botticini and Zvi Eckstein, which argues that throughout history, a religious emphasis on literacy and learning explains how Jews became “an urban population of traders, entrepreneurs, bankers, financiers, lawyers, physicians, and scholars.”

But where Botticini and Eckstein credit social structures that prioritized education with paving the way for Jewish successes, Wade claims that the real driving force was the evolution of a unique intelligence that has allowed Jews to thrive, even in the face of a hostile majority. Wade quotes historian Jerry Muller as saying that “Jews had the behavioral traits conducive to success in a capitalist society,” and uses this to argue that, just as “Eskimos”



are adapted to cold weather and Tibetans are adapted to high altitudes, Jews are “adapted” to capitalism.

This “adaptation” to capitalism has come about, according to Wade, through an “evolutionary process” that has led to Jewish minorities producing “proportionately more individuals of higher cognitive capacity” than their “host populations.” Wade neglects to mention that in the same essay he uses as justification for his claims about Jewish adaptation to capitalism, Muller points out that he is explicitly talking about “the transmission of cultural traits” and warns against “the error of treating group characterizations that are the *product* of history (such as business acumen) as if they were the *source* of historical development.”

Wade bases his belief in genetically-enhanced Jewish intelligence on a [single paper](#), which he describes as “[t]he only serious recent attempt by researchers to delve into the links between Jewish genetics and intelligence.” This paper, from University of Utah researchers Henry Harpending, Gregory Cochran, and Jason Hardy, “elaborates the hypothesis that the unique demography and sociology of Ashkenazim in medieval Europe selected for intelligence.”

That hypothesis is the brainchild of [Kevin MacDonald](#), an evolutionary psychologist and director of the racist American Freedom Party (formerly “American Third Position”), which he founded with lawyer [William D. Johnson](#), who has proposed repealing the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Amendments, replacing them with a Constitutional amendment which reads:

No person shall be a citizen of the United States unless he is a non-Hispanic white of the European race, in whom there is no ascertainable trace of Negro blood, nor more than one-eighth Mongolian, Asian, Asia Minor, Middle Eastern, Semitic, Near

Eastern, American Indian, Malay or other non-European or non-white blood, provided that Hispanic whites, defined as anyone with an Hispanic ancestor, may be citizens if, in addition to meeting the aforesaid ascertainable trace and percentage tests, they are in appearance indistinguishable from Americans whose ancestral home is in the British Isles or Northwestern Europe. Only citizens shall have the right and privilege to reside permanently in the United States.

MacDonald has published several books arguing that the Ashkenazim eugenically self-selected for high intelligence over several centuries, thus explaining the modern Jewish community's "general disproportionate representation in markers of economic success and political influence," and ability "to command a high level of financial, political, and intellectual resources in pursuing their political aims."

MacDonald is a fringe figure even within evolutionary psychology, a discipline that is often regarded with suspicion by other biologists. Steven Pinker is one of the leading scientific supporters of evolutionary psychology and biological explanations for psychometric data like IQ; [he is also interested in questions of Jewish intelligence](#). If anyone would be predisposed to a sympathetic reading of MacDonald's work, it would be Pinker. What he has actually said is that "MacDonald's main axioms — group selection of behavioral adaptations, and behaviorally relevant genetic cohesiveness of ethnic groups — are opposed by powerful bodies of data and theory" and, moreover, "MacDonald's various theses, even if worthy of scientific debate individually, collectively add up to a consistently invidious portrayal of Jews, couched in value-laden, disparaging language. It is impossible to avoid the impression that this is not an ordinary scientific hypothesis."



In fact, Pinker radically downplays the anti-Semitic nature of MacDonald's work. MacDonald is currently the editor and chief contributor to white supremacist magazine *Occidental Quarterly's* blog, [\*The Occidental Observer\*](#), and often makes inflammatory statements, suggesting, for example, that "[a] political crisis over Jewish influence is exactly what the United States needs," and "hatred toward all things European is normative among a great many strongly identified Jews." MacDonald is explicit that his theories about Jewish racial intelligence are intended to explain what he sees as the Jewish successes in a centuries-long war against Western society.

Although they may not share MacDonald's rabid anti-Semitism, Harpending and Cochran are no strangers to political controversy themselves. Cochran is a physicist whose previous forays into biology included the claim that [male homosexuality is caused by an infection](#). Cochran has also championed a [twist on the classic racist argument](#) that white people evolved to be more intelligent as a result of the hardships of living in colder climates. For Cochran, cold temperatures did not cause white people to become more intelligent, but rather warm environments have caused black people to accumulate a higher load of deleterious mutations, leading to significantly decreased intelligence.

Like Cochran, Harpending is obsessed with racial differences in intelligence. Harpending denies any racist motivations behind his work; however, his political activities tell a different story. In 2009, he participated in a [conference on "Preserving Western Civilization,"](#) where he spoke alongside notorious racists like [Peter Brimelow](#) (president and chief contributor to the white supremacist VDARE.com) and [Jean-Philippe Rushton](#) (president of the Pioneer Fund from 2002 until his death in 2012). The statement of purpose from that conference read:

We believe that America's Judeo-Christian heritage and European identity must be defended. Today, our glorious Western civilization is under assault from many directions. Three such threats will be discussed at this conference. First, the massive influx to the United States and Europe of Third-World immigrants who do not share our fundamental political and cultural values. Second, the threat from Islam, a militant ideology that is hostile to our society and, in principle, committed to destroying it. Third, because of the persistent disappointing performance of blacks (which many whites mistakenly blame on themselves) many whites have guilt feelings that undermine Western morale and deter us from dealing sensibly with the other threats.

Harpending is stridently anti-immigrant, [stating](#), "I personally favor mass deportation [of "illegal" Mexican immigrants]... It might not be so difficult: there must be a large number of FEMA trailers that could be used to stock processing centers and in Utah, the site of several WWII Japanese internment camps, plans and blueprints must exist to reconstruct those camps."

Harpending rejects the label of "racist," because, as far as he can tell, racism does not exist. Showing an impressive lack of self-awareness, [Harpending argues against the existence of racism](#) by comparing it to the "witchcraft" of the Herero people of the northern Kalihari, and suggesting that black Americans only perceive racism because of some inherent pan-African belief in "vague and invisible forces that are oppressing people."

Wade thus dedicated an entire chapter of his book to the issue of Jewish intelligence, on which his main source was a paper whose unabashedly racist lead author has suggested rounding up members of an ethnic minority and placing them in concentration camps, and which was inspired by and builds on the work of an



[unrepentant white supremacist and anti-Semite](#) who has [argued](#) that the Inquisitions and Nazism were “rational” responses to Jewish exploitation of the “gentile” population.

Wade tries to insulate himself against charges of racism by saying “that ideas about race are dangerous when linked to political agendas.” The problem is that he doesn’t appear to understand what constitutes a political agenda, and why bias can be a problem. Most of the people Wade chastises for political abuses of biology throughout his book were *anti-racist*. He uses paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould to prove that scientists “are as fallible as anyone else when their emotions or politics are involved.” Population geneticist Richard Lewontin’s arguments about biological diversity among human populations were based on a “misleading political twist.” Anthropologist Franz Boas’ anti-racism “may [have been] laudable in motive, but political ideology of any kind has no proper place in science.”

And so, for Wade, opposing racism is the kind of political bias that cannot be overcome, but white supremacy, anti-Semitism, and eugenics are not political at all, and certainly not sources of bias. Eminent scientists whose politics fall to Wade’s left, especially on race, are ideologues whose work is tainted. Yet Wade treats extremists like Lynn and Jensen, along with far-right businessman and failed Republican political candidate [Ron Unz](#), as serious thinkers on issues of race and psychometric analysis.

Wade also encourages belief in an academic conspiracy of silence on racial issues. He deliberately misrepresents scientists on the subject, twisting their words to suggest that they are admitting to being in on it. To take one example, Wade discusses a paper from forensic anthropologist Norman Sauer [arguing against the reality of biological race](#) and discussing how to avoid being

misunderstood by the public as endorsing it. Wade says that “[Sauer’s] suggestion was to obfuscate, by retaining the concept but substituting a euphemism for the word race, such as ancestry.” Needless to say, this is the opposite of Sauer’s conclusion, which was that anthropologists should “be more explicit about the social or cultural concepts of race” and “teach the non-existence of race in the classroom and do our best to clarify the use of races in forensic anthropology.”

Wade’s paranoid belief that he is sharing a forbidden truth that scientists are working to suppress makes little sense coming from a respected science journalist. It would certainly be out of place in the pages of the *New York Times*, but it’s an idea that has widespread popularity in the dark corners of the Internet, on websites and forums whose users equate diversity with “white genocide,” or rail against the [“Zionist Occupation Government.”](#)

*A Troublesome Inheritance* has served as a rallying point for an obscure far-right ideology called the [“Dark Enlightenment.”](#) Self-professedly “anti-democratic” and “neo-reactionary,” this movement brings together an [odd assortment of fascists, neo-Nazis, men’s rights activists, and libertarians](#) who are united by their hatred of the “politically correct” academic and media establishment (which they refer to as “the Cathedral”), and by their unshakable belief in the biological reality of their racist and sexist beliefs. The [“Dark Enlightenment” overlaps to great extent with the “human biodiversity” \(HBD\) movement](#), which is made up of (mostly pseudonymous) bloggers, bolstered by the support of a few fringe scientists. Among these scientists are Cochran and Harpending, who have their own HBD blog called [“West Hunter.”](#)

Wade’s book has been [publicly endorsed by former KKK Grand Wizard David Duke](#), championed by noted white supremacists like

[Jared Taylor](#), [John Derbyshire](#), and [Steve Sailer](#), and tirelessly promoted on the neo-Nazi forum Stormfront, [which the SPLC has shown to be linked to almost 100 racially motivated murders](#) over the past five years. For all of Wade's supposed concerns about the politicization of science, his book is entirely a phenomenon of the racist, far-right fringe.

Early in the book, he states that “anti-Semitism was not an idea that German scientists found in science; rather, they found it in their culture and allowed it to infect their science,” and that “the lessons of the past should not be forgotten and indeed are all the more relevant.” For that argument at least, *A Troublesome Inheritance* provides more than enough evidence.

Other reviews of *A Troublesome Inheritance*:

- [H. Allen Orr](#), “Stretch Genes,” *New York Review of Books*
- [Eric Michael Johnson](#), “On the Origin of White Power,” *Scientific American Blogs*
- [Jennifer Raff](#), “Nicholas Wade and race: building a scientific façade,” *Violent metaphors*
- [Jonathan Marks](#), “The Genes Made Us Do It,” *In These Times*
- [Augustin Fuentes](#), “The Troublesome Ignorance of Nicholas Wade,” *Huffington Post*
- [Arthur Allen](#), “Charging Into the Minefield of Genes and Racial Difference,” *The New York Times*

- [Ian Steadman, “’Jews are adapted to capitalism,’ and other nonsenses of the new scientific racism,” \*NewStatesman\*](#)

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